

Scientists capture first-ever video of giant squid in U.S. waters

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Heather Bracken-Grissom and Edie Widder coil line to retrieve the Medusa camera system. Credit: Florida International University

FIU marine scientists Heather Bracken-Grissom and Lori Schweikert were among a team of researchers gathered around a monitor when the tentacle first came into view. It floated in and out of the darkness offering no hint of what was on the other end. Then, in an elegant

explosion of arms and tentacles, the creature revealed itself—the phantom of the deep, known simply as the giant squid.

It is the first time the elusive creature has been caught on camera in U.S. waters—about 100 miles southwest of New Orleans in the Gulf of Mexico. It is only the second time the creature, which can grow up to 40 feet, has ever been captured on camera. The discovery was made toward the end of a 17-day research mission dubbed Journey into Midnight which began June 7.

"It was magical and surreal to see how the animal behaves in nature," Bracken-Grissom said. "To know that I was witnessing something that had only been seen once before in nature filled me with an overwhelming sense of gratitude and respect for what still is to be discovered."

Giant squids have largely avoided interactions with people because they live at great depths, typically 1,000 feet below the surface or more. The sighting and [video capture](#) were made possible by a camera system called the Medusa. It was developed by Edie Widder, founder of the Ocean Research and Conservation Association and was part of the team that first captured a giant [squid](#) on camera in 2012 near Japan. Widder was on hand for the latest sighting as part of the research team exploring the Gulf of Mexico. The researchers believe the squid they captured on camera this time around was a juvenile, measuring between 10 to 12 feet in length.

The Medusa features a ring of LED lights that resembles a bioluminescent jellyfish which attracts the squid. The [camera](#) system is attached to a mile-long cable that was lowered by the research team where it rested for hours recording life in the darkest depths of the Gulf of Mexico. The tedious task of reviewing the footage for different forms of marine life would begin each time the Medusa was retrieved. A

variety of marine experts were onboard to help identify what they were seeing including Bracken-Grissom and Schweikert, an FIU post-doctoral researcher, both looking for crustaceans.

After five deployments and more than 120 hours of footage, the entire team gathered around a monitor as the giant squid came into view, first stalking the LED bait and eventually wrapping its long tentacles around it. Quickly realizing the imposter jellyfish was not what it seemed, the giant squid thrust itself back into the darkness. As quickly as it had entered the picture, it was gone. But it was enough to take the breath away of each of the researchers.

"When the squid appeared I couldn't believe what I was seeing," Schweikert said. "I was elated, a feeling that was only matched by the deep satisfaction of sharing that moment with a team who had worked toward this discovery their entire life."

The Journey into Midnight research mission was led by Sönke Johnsen from Duke University and supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The researchers embarked on the mission to study light and light below the twilight zone where light does not penetrate. Bracken-Grissom and the members of her Crustaceans Genomics and Systematics Lab are always on the hunt for new sources of bioluminescence and trying to better understand how animals survive at the darkest depths of the ocean.

Provided by Florida International University

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